

Small Harbor Cutters and AB Boats

of the U. S. Revenue Cutter Service and U. S. Coast Guard

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Historian Coast Guard Tug Association

Small boats have provided yeoman service to the Coast Guard and its predecessors from the beginning of these organizations. The earliest were pulling boats and small sailing craft. In fact the first Revenue Cutters were hardly bigger than some of the Harbor Craft described in this essay. Of course the Lifesaving Service made use of surf boats and lifeboats in great numbers and the Lighthouse Service tended aids to navigation with tenders both large and small. But here I have tried to limit coverage to the Steam and Motor Powered small craft which fulfilled the Boarding and inspection role of the Revenue Cutter Service (RCS) and later the Coast Guard (upon the merger of RCS and the Lifesaving Service in 1915). An important duty for these services has always been the enforcement of Customs Laws to assure the collection of Duty imposed upon Merchant Cargos. These boats were nearly all of wooden construction and I have noted the exceptions.

As the volume of trade increased with the growth of this country the boarding and inspection of vessels in Harbor and at anchor became a major task. The advent of Steam Powered vessels further complicated matters. Thus small Harbor Craft became even more important for Boarding and Inspections. Most of the early craft covered here were Steam Launches which came into use as early as the 1860's. Much of the data for this essay has been gathered from Official sources, but records on many of these craft is spotty at best and secondary sources have helped to fill in some of the big gaps in the available Official Records. This first go at providing comprehensive information on this heretofore largely ignored subject is no doubt less than complete. The author will be grateful to anyone who can help to further fill in the gaps or correct any errors.

Revenue Cutter Service and Coast Guard Pre WW II -- Small Harbor Cutters and AB Boats

Type.	Name (Former Name)	Call S.	Built	Displ-Speed	Dimensions	Engine- Complement	Notes
S/L	Discoverer		1869-NY	11GT	38x10.5x5'5"x5		Sta-Savannah, GA, DC-1896
S/L	Search (1)		1869-NY	12GT	40x10.5x5'5"x5		Sta-Baltimore, MD, Sold-1896
S/L	Penrose (Chas.B.) (xJosie R., acq1883)	GVDL	Tottensville, NY	38T	67x12x5x5	1Off 3-Enl	Sta-Galves'n & Pens'ola DC-1924
S/L	Tybee (Steel Hull, Later AB-15)	GVDW	1895-Camden	28T	67x11'8"x7'1"x5	Cpl-6	Sta-Savannah Sold-1930
S/L	Guard (1) (Also known as No.1)	GVFB	1896-Pt T's'nd, WA	22GT	65x9.5x4.5x5'5"		Sta-Friday Har,WA Sld1912
S/L	Scout (1)	GVFC	1896-Pt T's'nd, WA	22GT	65x9.5x4.5x5'5"		Sta-Pt. T'send, WA Sld1915
M/L	Relief (Acq-1921, Later AB-10)		1897-Neposet, MA	12T	47x10.5x3'8"	Gasoline, Cpl-3	Sta-Morfolk Sold-1933
M/L	Patrol (1) (Acq-1905)		1899-Jersey City, IL		36'2"	Gasoline	Sta-Chicago Str-1915
M/L	Delmarva (Supply boat 1998, later AB-22)		1900-Clinton, CT		46'7"x12'11"x3	Gasoline	Sta- Chincoteague, VA, NRF-1934
S/L	Alert (1)	GVFR	1901-NY	35-T/19-GT	62.5x11'3"x5x5.5		Sta-Mobile, AL, DC & Replaced 1907
M/L	Scout (2) (xCust.Svc. Acq1914; Ltr AB-11)	GVFC	1903-Astoria, OR	40-T	61.5x13x5.5	Gasoline, Cpl-6	Sta-Seattle, WA;Sold-1930
M/L	Valiant (xVirginia-USN)		1905-LI, NY		42'10"x9.5x2'8"	Gasoline	Sta-N.O., LA Sold-1922
M/L	Voyager (SP-361, Acq 1919, Later AB-18)		1906-BayCity,MI	35-T	52x10.5x4	Gasoline	Sta-SSM,MI DC circa 1936
S/L	Carolina		1906-Morehead City, NC		57.5x13'1"		Sta-Elizaberth Cty, NC Sold1922

Type.	Name (Former Name)	Call S.	Built	Displ-Speed	Dimensions	Engine- Complement	Notes
S/L	Alert (2) (replaced Alert (1) above)	GVFR	1907-Mobile,AL	35T	61.5'x11'x5'x5.5'		Sta-Mobile, AL
M/L	Javelin (Acq-1919, xJessamine SP-438)		1907-Pt Jeff, NY	57T-13kts2-scr	90'3'x14'x3'9"	Gasoline	Sta-Detroit Sold-1922
M/L	Guide		1908-Bayonne	41T-9kts2-scr	70'x13'x7'11"4'8"	Gasoline, 1Off 6Enl	Sta-NY, 1st Gas Eng'n RCS
M/L	Moriches (Acq-1916, Wood)		1908-Moriches, NY		32'x6'x2'x2'		Sta-Bay Shore, NY - DC-Circa 1918
M/L	Dart (xNotoyo SP-517 Acq-1919)		1909-Quincy,MA	10kts	44.5'x9'7"x3'9"	Gasoline Sta-N. L., CT	Sold-1922, Listed as AB-5 incorrectly
M/L	Venture (Acq1918 ren. Catherine 1919)		1910-Chincoteague,VA		47'x10.5'x3.5'	Sta-Chicoteague, was to be ren	AB-16 Sold 1st1923
M/L	Vigilant (Acq-1910, Later AB-17)		Bay City, MI	45T-8kts	45'x11'7"x3.5'	Gasoline-2Off 4Enl	Sta-SSM, MI DC-1940
M/L	Dash (xArtmar III SP-408 acq-1919 Later AB-5)		1912-E.Gr'ich,RI	32GT-11kts	64'x12'x3.5'	Gasoline - Cpl-5	Sta-Buzz'ds Bay+ChasSC
M/L	Vidette (Acq1919, xHowanda SP-144)		1913-Essing'n,PA	38T	75'x16'x3'4"	Gasoline - 1-gun	Sta-KW & Miami Sold-1925
M/L	Dare (xKatherich II, SP-148; later AB-4)		1913-Jax, FL Acq.1919	9kts	40'x10'x2'	Gasoline	Sta-Manteo, NC, Sold 1924
M/L	Leader (Acq-1919, xAdmiral-USN, SP-541)		1913-Boothbay Har, ME		73'x6'3"	Gasoline	Sta-Portsmouth, NH Burned-1920
M/L	AB-23 (xGadwell, Acq-1924, Used as Cable Boat)		1913-Manteo,NC	12-T-7kt	49.5'x11'x2.5'	Gasoline	Sta-Chast'n, SC Sold-1932
S/L	Guard (2) (B#24) (16Feb42recl. WYT-82)	NRKY	1913-MINY	52-T	67'7"x12.5x6'3"	Steam	Sta-Friday Har,& Seattle WA Sld-1943
M/L	Lookout (Acq1919, xMiss Anne II,SP-657, Ltr-AB-7)		1915-JAX	12-T-10kts	41'x10'x2'3"	Gasoline - Cpl-2 1-1pdr	Sta-Chast'nSC Sold1933
M/L	Pioneer (xGurkha SP-600, Acq-1919, Later AB-9)		1915-Lynn, MA	30-GT-12kts	58'11"x13'	Gasoline -Cpl-4	Sta-MA DC circa1934
M/L	Messenger Aq1919 Marguerite SP-193, LtrAB-8)	GVFJ	1916-Salisbury, MD	33-T	60'x13'x2'9"	Gasoline - Cpl-4,1-1pdr.	Sta-Mobile DC-1931
M/L	Advance (xLucy T., later AB-1 then CG-33)		1917-Tonawanda,NY	11-T- 8-kts	50'x11'x3.5'	Gasoline - Cpl-4	Sta-S.S.M.,MI, DC-1939
M/L	Kangaroo (SP-1284, Acq1919, Later AB-6)		1917	29GT- 21kts	62'4"x10'11"x3.5	2-scr 180hp	Sta-ChasSC Sld-1932
M/L	Patrol (2) (Later AB-28) BN-29	NRKI	1917-CityIsl,NY	23T- 15kts	69'x14'x3'7"	1Off8-Enl 1-1pdr	StaNY DC-1940
M/L	Search (2) (Later AB-12 then CG-12)		1917-Benton Har, MI	21kts-2scr	40'x10'x3'	360-HP Gasoline - Cpl-5	Sta-Chi, DC-1940
M/L	Swift (Acq-1919, xBroadbill, xSP-823)		1917-LA		66'x13.5'x3'3"	Gasoline-2-Sc200hp 1-1pdr	Sta-SF
M/L	Coquet (Acq Fr Corps of Eng. 1918 ret. 1919)						
StmTug	Caswell (xRichard, Acq1918 ret 1919)					Steam	Sta-NY
StmTug	Ross (xEmma Kate, AcqUSN1918 OpByCG ret1919)			350T	104'2"x20'x12'	Steam	Sta-NY
StmTug	Takana (Acq1918 by USN to Port Collector NY ret1919)			68T- 10kts	69'5"x18'7"x7'9"	Steam	Sta-NY
M/L	Sentinel (1) (xSP-180, Ren. Tulare, Later AB-14)		1919-Alameda	15T 9.7kt	64'x15'8"x5'1"	Gasoline - Cpl-5	Sta-SF DC Circa1935
M/L	Sentinel (2) xRobert Morris (Later AB-13)		1918-N.Tonawanda,NY	12T - 8-kts	45'x11.5'x4'	Gasoline - Cpl-4	Sta-SS Marie,MI DC circa1940
M/L	Arrow (x Apache SP-729, Acq-1919, Ltr AB-2)	GVHQ		23-kts	62'4"x10'11"x3	Gasoline-2-scr 180hp	Sta-Tampa To Ship'g Board 1925
M/L	Cossack (xSP-695, later AB-3)		1919-Boothbay Har.	20-kts	64'x9'4"x2'	Gasoline-2-scr 180hp	Sta-Tampa & Key West, FL
Tug	Lexington (former USA Quartermaster Corps)		Comm1923 -NYC		122.5'x22'x7.5'		Sold-1924

Type.	Name (Former Name)	Call S.	Built	Displ-Speed	Dimensions	Engine- Complement	Notes
M/L	AB-19 (BN-42)		1923-Salisbury, MD		64'10"x14'		Sta-Pensacola, FL
M/L	AB-20 (BN-43)		1923-Salisbury, MD		64'10"x14'		Sta-Moblile, AL
M/L	M. B. Chadwick (Acq-1923, xSupply Boat 1949, Later AB-21)			40T	64'9"x17'	6.5kt	Sta-Eliz. City, NC Sold-1932
	<i>AB-22 see above blt-1900 (xDelmarva)</i>						
	<i>AB-23 -- see above blt-1913 (xGadwell purch-1924)</i>						
M/L	AB-24 (build as an icebreaker)		1928-Solomon's Isl, MD	34T	52x18'10"x3	Diesel	Sta-Bay Shore, NY DC-circa1935
M/L	Moto Morovich (Seized boat Acq1928,AB-25)				42.5'x12'x4'		Sta-Ft Lauderdale Sold-1929
StmTug	Lightning (Acq 1931 fr. USSB)		1920-Milford, DE	397-T	(94'or)110'x24.5'x13'7"		Sta-NYC Sld-1935
	<u>Former Customs Bureau Boats -- AB-30 to 59 -- all acquired 1934</u>						
M/L	AB-30				72'x13.5'x6'	Gasoline	Sta-NY
M/L	AB-31		1914		66'x13'5' x5'	Gasoline	Sta-NY
M/L	AB-32		1931-Brooklyn		36'x10'x4	Gasoline	Sta-NY
M/L	AB-33		1928-Morris Hgts., NY		34'x9'4"x4'	Gasoline	Sta-NY
M/L	AB-36 x-Peg		1925-Neponset, MA		45'	Gasoline	Sta-Boston, MA
M/L	AB-37 x-W. W. Lufkin		1927-Essex, MA		56.5'	Gasoline	Sta-Boston, MA
M/L	AB-38 x-Gertrud O.		1924-Lubec, ME	24-GT	53'10"x15'x5.5'	Diesel	Sta-Boston, MA
M/L	AB-39 x-Pueblo, x-CG-9271		1930- Morris Hgts., NY		67'x15'	Gasoline	Sta-Boston, MA
M/L	AB-40 x-Gadfly		1896		44'	Gasoline	Sta-Pearth Amboy, NJ
M/L	AB-41 x-Robert Morris		1929-Norfolk		64'11"x14'10"x8'3"	Gasoline	Sta-Philadelphia
M/L	AB-42 x-Retriever, x-Customs Boat 603				40'		Sta-Baltimore, DC-1936
M/L	AB-43 x-Pocahantas (a second AB-43,12-GT ,50'x11'x4.5', served in 1936)				45'	Gasoline	Sta-Norfolk, DC 1936
M/L	AB-44 x-Powhatan II (a second AB-44,43-GT,64'11x14"x7'8", served in 1936)				58'	Diesel	Sta-Norfolk, DC-1936
M/L	AB-45 x-Zebadiah, x-CG-9263				44'	Gasoline	Sta-Wilmington, NC
M/L	AB-46 x-V-21186 (a second AB-46,12-GT,44'x11'3"x3'9", served in 1936)				41'	Gasoline	Sta-Charleston, SC, DC-1936
M/L	AB-47 x-Miss Billy				42'	Gasoline	Sta-Savannah, GA
M/L	AB-48 x-Arrow				61'		Sta-New Orleans
M/L	AB-49 x-Fidelia, x-CG-996		1930-Pascagula	12-T	52'	Gasoline	Sta-New Orleans
M/L	AB-50 x-Malvina, x-CG-958				42'		Sta-New Orleans
M/L	AB-51 x-Kalita		1918-Gulfport, MS		61'x12'5"x6.5'	Gasoline	Sta-Galveston
M/L	AB-52 x-Cordelia				52'	Gasoline	Sta-Galveston
M/L	AB-53				36'		Sta-San Diego
M/L	AB-54 x-Q-2				62'x12'x4.5'	Diesel	Sta-Los Angeles, San Pedro, CA

Type.	Name (Former Name)	Call S.	Built	Displ-Speed	Dimensions	Complement	Notes
M/L	AB-55				38'		Sta-Los Angeles
M/L	AB-56 x-May		Bay Island, NY	34-T	60'9"x11.5'x4'	Gasoline	Sta-Bar Harbor, Rockland, ME
M/L	AB-57 x-Dart				48'	Gasoline	Sta-Bar Harbor, ME
M/L	AB-58 (1) x-Cassasa (2)		1930- Nova Scotia 1931-Nova Scotia		62'x14'x4'7' 63'x11.5"x5.5	Gasoline Gasoline	Sta-Booth Bay & Portland, ME, DC-1936 served in 1936 to 1938)
M/L	AB-59 x-Goodluck		1929-Jonesport, ME	31-T	58'9"x13'x6'	Diesel	Sta-Rockland, ME
M/L	AB-60		Blt-1929 P.Harbor		45x10x3'5"	Gasoline	Sta-Honolulu
H-Tug	AB-25 later CG-63300	NRKA	Blt-1936 Neponset, MA	69-T-11-kt	63.5'x19.5'x5'5"	1-300HPdiesel	Sta-Chincoteague
H-Tug	AB-26 later CG-63301	NRKB	Blt-1936		"		Sta-Bay Shore, NY
H/Tug	AB-61 later CG-56300	NRHB	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY	33-T-11-kts	56'x13'11"x4'	diesel	Sta-NYC
H/Tug	AB-62 later CG-56301	NRHC	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY		"	"	Sta-NYC
H/Tug	AB-63 later CG-56302	NRHD	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY		"	"	Sta-NYC
H/Tug	AB-64 later CG-56303	NRHF	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY		"	"	Sta-Boston, MA
H/Tug	AB-65 later CG-56304	NRHG	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY		"	"	Sta-Boston, MA
H/Tug	AB-66 later CG-56305	NRHH	Blt-1937 Brooklyn, NY	33-T-11-kts	56'x13'11"x4'	diesel	Sta-Norfolk
H/Tug	AB-67 later CG-56306	NRHJ	Blt-1937 Terminal Isl., CA	32-T-11-kts	56.x14'5"x4.5'	diesel	Sta-San Francisco
H/Tug	AB-68 later CG-56307	NRHK	Blt-1937 Terminal Isl., CA		"	"	Sta-Seattle

The Harbor Cutters on the CG Vessel List for 1923 were all renamed as **AB-1** through **AB-18**. The **Venture** which was to be **AB-16** was sold however, before she could be renamed. At this point the question arises as to what the AB stands for. While I cannot find any official statement to confirm or deny my personal hypothesis on this question, I believe that AB stands for Anchorage and Boarding. I've always held this opinion since as a boy I saw the notation in **Jane's Fighting Ships**, a copy of which appears to the right and is from page 523 of the 1937 editions of **Jane's**.

AB-19 and **AB-20** are sometimes overlooked. As they were by Donald Canney in his book **U. S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790-1935**. They were built by the Coast Guard and received Coast Guard **Building Numbers 42 and 43**. They seem to be the first small diesel powered harbor launches to serve in the Coast Guard. All prior examples were powered by Gasoline or Steam engines. AB's became CGC's in 1939 and were renumbered as CG with their length as a prefix in 1942 as shown above. Older boats were DC by 1940.



AB 26.

1937 Official.

A.B. 25, 26 (Boston, Mass., 1936). Wood, sheathed. Displacement: 72 tons. Dimensions: 63½ × 19 × 5 feet. Diesel engine. 1 shaft. H.P.: 300 = 10 kts.).

There are also 40 anchorage and boarding vessels, known as AB. boats and bearing numbers with the prefix AB, from 1 to 63, employed on harbour duties.

Numerical Listing of AB Boats

AB#	Former Name(s), Later		Call S.	Yr.&Place Bt	Yr. Acq.	Yr.DCd	Displ.	Dimensions	Sta. & Notes
1	Advance	x-BN-33		1917-Tonawanda, NY	1919	1939	11-T	50'x11'x3.5'	S. S. Marie, MI
2	Arrow	x-Apache SP-729	GVHQ	1917-Bristol, RI	1919	1924		62'4"x10'11"x3	1-gun Tampa, FL & Mobile, AL
3	Cossack	x-SP-695	GVFN	1916-Neponset, MA	1919	1924		64'x9'4"x2'	Tampa & Key West, FL
4	Dare	x-Katerich II SP-148		1913-Jacksonville, FL	1919	1924		40x10x2 9kts	Manteo, NC
5	Dash	x-Artmar SP-408		1912-E. Greenwich, RI	1919	1933		63'x12'x3.5'	Buzzards Bay, New London
6	Kangaroo	x-SP-1284	GVFT	1917-Bristol, RI	1919	1932	12-T 29-GT	62'4"x10'11"x3'5"	Charleston, SC
7	Lookout	x-Miss Ann II SP-657		1915-Jacksonville, FL	1919	1933	35-GT	41'x10'x2'3"	Beaufort, SC
8	Messenger	x-Marguerite SP-193		1916-Salisbury, MD	1919	1931	33-T	60'x13'x2'9"	Mobile, AL
9	Pioneer	x-Guerka SP-600		1915-Lynn, MA	1919	circa1934	30-GT	58'11"x13' 12kt	Wakefield, RI
	A 2nd AB-9 x-John B. Hathaway, become CG-415-1940			1925	1930	x-CG-984 & 810		81'x18'5"x7'10' 8kts	Semi-diesel, Sta-Boston
10	Relief	none		1897- Neponset, MA	1921	1933	30-GT	47'x10.5'x3'8"	Norfolk & S. Baltimore, MD
11	Scout	x-Patrol #2	GVFC	1903-Astoria, OR	1914	1930		61.5'x13'x5.5'	Seattle & Port Townsend, WA
12	Search	x-BN-31		1917-Benton Har., MI	1917	1922	12-T	40'x9'x3'	Chicago & S. S. Marie., MI
13	Sentinel	x-BN-41		1918-N. Tonawanda, NY	1918	1923	12-T	45'x11.5'x4'	Sault Ste. Marie, MI
14	Tulare	Sentinel, SP-180		1917-San Francisco	1919	1936		64'x15'8"x5'1"	San Francisco
15	Tybee	none	GVBW	1895-Camden, NJ	1895	1930	40-T	63'x11'8"x7'1"	Savannah, GA
(16)	Venture	x-Catherine		1910-Chincoteague, VA	1918	1922		47'x10.5'x3.5'	Chincoteague, VA
17	Vigilant	none		1910-Bay City, MI	1923	1923	15-T	45'x11'7"x3.5'	Sault Ste. Marie, MI
18	Voyager	x-SP-361		1906-Bay City, MI	1919	1935		52'x11'x3.5'	Sault Ste. Marie, MI
19	none	x-BN-42		1923-Salisbury, MD	1923	?	40-T	64'10"x14'	Pensacola & New Orleans
20	none	x-BN-43		1923-Salisbury, MD	1923	?	40-T	ditto	Mobile, AL
21	M. B. Chadwick	x-Supply Boat #1949	NRHO	1923-Mateo, NC	1923	?		64'9"x17' Semi-diesel	Elizeth City, NC
22	Delmarva	none		1900-Clinton, CT	1900	?	32-GT	46'7"x12'11"x3'	Chincoteague & Lewes, DE
23	Gadwell	none		1913-Manteo, NC	1924	1932	12-T	49.5'x11.5'x2.5'	Manteo, K. West, Charleston
24	none	none		1928-Solomons I, MD	1928	1936	34-T	52'x18'10"x3'	Bay Shore, NY
(25)	Moto Morovich (a seized boat) briefly carried this AB# in 1928-29 -- it was reused as you see.							42.5'x12.5'x4'	St. Petersburg, FL
25	CG-63300	NRKA		1936-Boston	1936	?	69-T	63.5'x19.5'x5'5"	Chincoteague, VA
26	CG-63301	NRKB		1937-Boston	1937	?	69T	ditto	Bay Shore, NY
27	none	NRHQ		1920-San Francisco		1939	23-T	60'x13'x4'7"	
28	Patrol #2	NRKI		1917-City Isl., NY		1940		69'x14'x3'7"	NYC- DC - NYC
29	x-Customs Boat #602			1936-Brooklyn		1940		42'x12'	San Juan, P.R.
30	none			1912		1937		72'x13.5'x5'	NYC
31	none			1914		1937		66'x13'x5'	NYC
32	none			1931-Brooklyn		1937		36'x10'x4'	NYC
33	none			1928-Morris Hgts., NY		1935		34'x9'4"x4'	NYC
34	none								

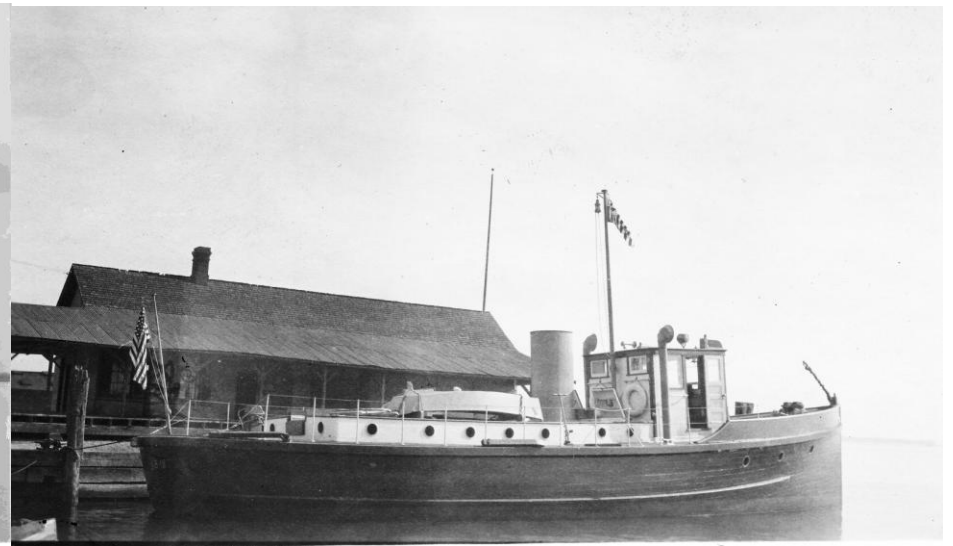
AB#	Former Name(s), Later	Call S.	Yr.&Place Blt	Yr. Acq.	Yr.DCd	Displ.	Dimensions	Sta. & Notes
35	none							
36	x-Peg		1925-Neponset, MA	1934	1937			
37	x-W. W. Lufkin		1927-Essex, MA	1934	1937			
38	x-Gertrud O.		1924-Lubec, ME	1934	1940	24-GT	53'10"x15'x5.5'	Boston
39	x-Pueblo	x-CG-9271	1930-Mossis Hgts., NY	1934	1937	45-GT	64'11"x14'10"x8'3"	Boston
40	x-Gadfly		1896	1934	1940		44'x12'x4'4"	Perth Amboy, NJ
41	x-Robert Morris		1929-Norfolk	1934	"	45-T	64'11"x14'10"x8'3"	Philadelphia
42	x-Retriever	x-Custons Boat 603		1934	1936			Baltimore
43	x-Pocahantas	x-Custons Boat 55		1934	1940	12-GT	50'x11'x4.5'	Norfolk
44	x-Powhattan II	x-Custons Boat 542	1927-Norfolk	1934	"	43-GT	64'11"x14.5'x7'8"	Norfolk
45	x-Zebadiah	xCG-9263		1934	"	18-T	44'x11'11"x5'	Wilmington, NC
46	x-VC-21186		1931	1934	"	12-T	44'x11'3"x3'9"	Charleston, SC
47	x-Miss Billy	x-Custons Boat 4254	Jacksonville, FL	1934	"	5-T	42'x11'2"x3'8"	Savannah, GA
48	x-Arrow	x-Custons Boat 804		1934	1936	12-T	61'	New Orleans
49	x-Fidelia	x-CG-996 x-Custons Boat 588	1930-Pascagoula, MS	1934	"	12-T	52'9"x15.5'x3'	New Orleans
50	x-Malvina E.	x-CG-958 x-Custons Boat 4475		1934	1936		42'	New Orleans
51	x-Kalita	x-Custons Boat 58	1918-Gulfport, MS	1934	1936		61'x12'5"x6.5'	Galveston
52	x-Cordelia	x-Custons Boat 538	Morris Hgts., NY	1934	1938		52'4"x11'3"x3.5'	Galveston
53	none	x-Custons Boat 4488		1934	1936		36'	San Diego
54	x-Q-1	x-Custons Boat 524	Stamford, CT	1934	1940		62'x12'x4.5'	LA & San Pedro, CA
55	none	x-Custons Boat 4481		1934	1936			Los Angeles
56	x- May	x-Custons Boat 481	1924-City Island, NY	1934	"	34-GT	60'9"x11.5'x4'	Bar Harbor & Rockland, ME
57	x-Dart	x-CG-904	1931-Thomaston, ME	1934	"		48'x12.5'x5'	Bar Harbor, ME
58	x-Cassasa	x-Custons Boat 4450	1930-Nova Scotia	1934	"		63'x11.5'x5.5'	S. Bar Harbor, ME
59	x-Goodluck	x-CGC835; 974;820; CB-4476	1929-Jonasport, ME	1934	1940	31-T	58'9"x13'x6'	Rockland, ME
60	none		1929-Pearl Harbor	1934	1937		45'x10'x3'5"	Honolulu
61		CG-56300	NRHB 1937-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	56'x13'11"x4'	NYC
62		CG-56301	NRHC 1936-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	ditto	NYC
63		CG-56302	NRHD 1937-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	ditto	NYC
64		CG-56303	NRHF 1937-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	ditto	Boston
65		CG-56304	NRHG 1937-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	ditto	Boston
66		CG-56305	NRHH 1937-Brooklyn	1937		33-T	56'x13'11"x4'	Norfolk
67		CG-56306	NRHJ 1937-Terminal Island	1937		32-T	56'x14'5"x4.5'	San Francisco
68		CG-56307	NRHK 1937-Terminal Island	1937		32-T	ditto	Seattle

AB-30 to 59 were all former Customs Bureau Boats acquired in 1934. SP numbered boats were all former Section Patrol craft taken over by USN in WW I and passed on the CG. The 56-footers, 63-footers, and their war-built cousins the 64-footers served well into the 1960s. New small tugs and patrol craft replaced the functions of these venerable old work horses and they have all faded away to near obscurity in the 21st Century. **We haven't forgotten, and we salute you!**

Photos of AB Boats and others



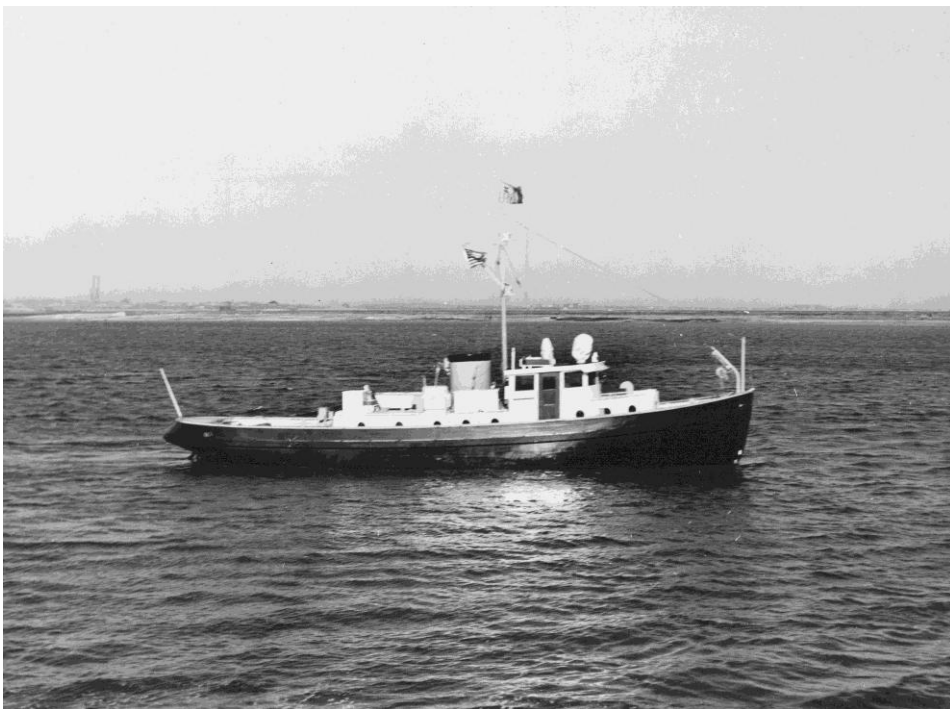
CGC-14, Circa 1940 Formerly **AB-14**



AB-19, Nov. 1923, Newly Commissioned., Probably at Salisbury, MD



AB-20, Circa 1925, sister of **AB-19**, probably at Mobile, AL

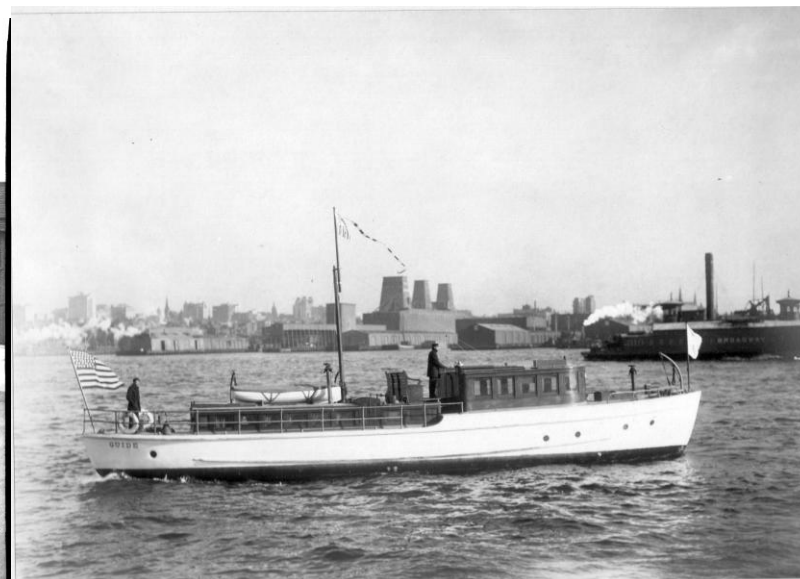


AB-24, 30 Jan 1929, Probably Off Long Island, NY



AB-25, Circa 1937, later became **CG-63300**, 1st stationed at Chincoteague, VA

AB-26, also Circa 1937, Probably off Long Isl., NY, later was **CG-63301**



Former **AB-61** high and dry for repairs at CG Yard in 1949

Guide a 70-foot launch Circa 1910 in NYC, 1st to be Gasoline powered



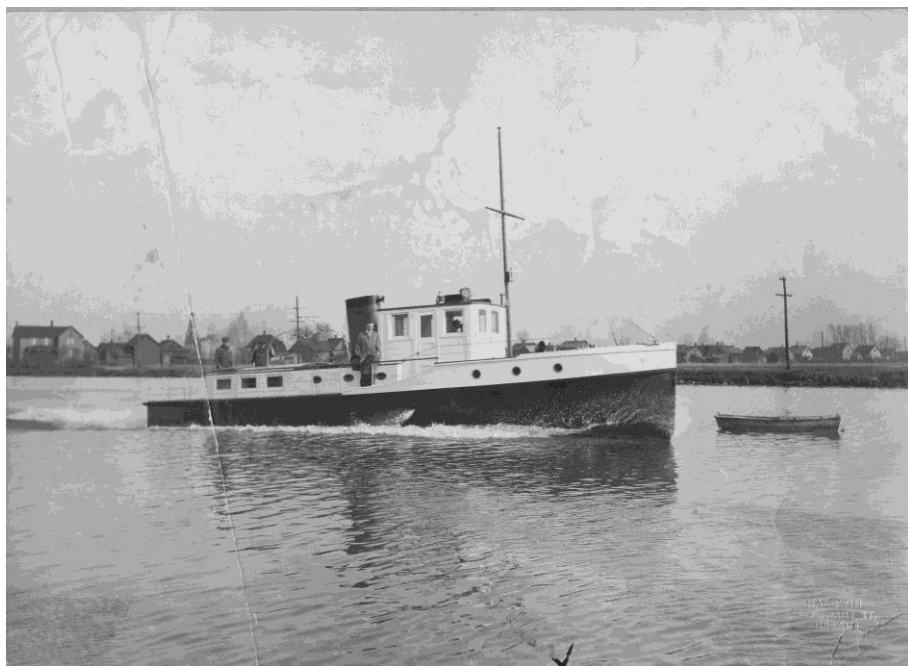
AB-28 shown circa 1930, was formerly named **Patrol** (the second boat by that name). She was built and served in NY with a tour of duty in DC as well.



AB-49 was build in 1930 and was formerly **CG-996**



AB-54 xQ-1 was taken over from the Customs Service in 1934 and served in CA



AB-1 as built 1917 named Lucy T., she later became **Advance** and then **CG-33**



AB-67 was a 56-footer built in 1937 & later became **CG-56306**



CG-64213 built during WW II is a close cousin to the AB's of the late 1930's

Abbreviations Used in Tables of Vessels

BN	=	Building Number
Call S.	=	Call Sign
DC	=	Decommissioned
GT	=	Gross Tonnage
M/L	=	Motor Launch
Ret.	=	Returned to original agency
S/L	=	Steam Launch
SP	=	Section Patrol (USN)

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Treasury Department - GPO - 1964



CG-63301 the former **AB-26** is shown in the Potomac some time in the 1950's

Final Word from the Author

This project has stretched over years rather than months and I've brought it to a close simply because it's time to move on. Due to the lack of 100% complete data, I don't think that this listing will ever be 100% complete and error free, but it's as close as I can make it right now. As mentioned earlier I welcome additions and corrections.

I've always been fascinated with numbers and the numbering and Classification Systems of the Navy and Coast Guard ships. Part of the reason for that fascination is that numbers provide a SYSTEM for bringing order and organization to large groups of ships and boats which would be difficult or impossible to track, recognize, differentiate and control otherwise. It certainly make identifying the ships in the photographs which I take and collect much easier.

I've learned though, that part of the fun in dealing with the Coast Guard's unique Classification and Numbering system, is not just learning the rules for using the system, but grasping the EXCEPTIONS as well. When the service was small and had just a few ships and craft, there was no real need for numbering these vessels. The sole numbering system which existed early on gave numbers to vessels which were being built under the control of the Coast Guard or its predecessors. These numbers are the **Building Numbers** which provided an identification to the contracts before the ships were named and a simple way to file vessels' paperwork and track personnel and expenses at Headquarters, both during construction and after completion. **Building Numbers** were given out in the order in which the contracts were granted and thus were roughly chronological. They were not used for identification by painting them on the ships and were not a part of the ships' Official Names nor Designations.

Exception, of course, is said to prove the rule. And this couldn't be truer than in the Coast Guard. During the years of Prohibition a couple of dozen older USN Destroyers were Recommissioned into the Coast Guard to chase Rum Runners. They were not only given "CG" numbers, but wore the CG and their assigned numbers prominently on their bows. This prevented confusion as to the owner/operator of these ships and made it easier for a Rummy to get a good running start when they saw that big CG on the haze gray hull. I'm kidding a bit, of course. Several of these Old Destroyers were soon worn out to the point where they were not dependable and spent more time repairing than operating. As the worn out ships were retired a second batch of slightly newer "Flush Deckers" replaced them and were numbered with duplicate numbers. Just an example of rule by exception.

Now we come to the **AB Boats**. They first appeared in 1923 when the 18 Harbor Cutters on the CG list were numbered **AB 1 through 18** in Alphabetical order according to their former names. Additional higher numbers were added as additional Harbor craft were acquired. The numbers extend higher until the highest number was the **AB-68** commissioned in 1937. As to the matter of duplicate numbers within the ranks of the AB's, it seems common practice to reuse numbers at will, especially when a boat was retired and replaced at the same location, often the replacement was one of the seized rum runner boats which were plentiful while Prohibition lasted. Did these boats have their designation and numbers painted on? Most of the time, it appears. The proceeding photos provide evidence of that, but again there were exceptions.

It wasn't until World War II, when the Coast Guard was placed under U. S. Navy control that a CG service wide Designation and Numbering system came into general use in the Coast Guard. And of course the Navy always wants to do things their way, so their system was adapted for CG use. Thus began the evolution of present USCG Designation and Numbering system. While patterned after the USN system the numbers were chosen on the fly and unlike the Navy's practice numbers are not chronological nor permanently or exclusively assigned. There has been a effort however, to keep duplicate numbers from simultaneous use to avoid confusion. But once a number is out of use it's fair game to use it a second or even a third time it seems. But even the Navy has departed from strict and fast numbering rules these days and have assigned some "cute" numbers, such as the reuse of submarine numbers **SS-21 to 23** for the **Seawolf** class while the newer **Virginia** class are numbered in the 770's.

Here's hoping that this little article will be found by a sizable audience to be useful and interesting. It should appeal to lovers of the Coast Guard, its ships and craft, and it's long, varied and fascinating history. ***Semper Paratus You All!***